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Children, Spouses, and Attitudes: Impact on Women's Work Status

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CHILDREN, SPOUSES, AND ATTITUDES: IMPACT ON WOMEN'S WORK STATUS

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Abstract

Women face unique challenges in their balancing of career and family. Some questions women consider include children and childcare, spouses' earning potential and relationship stability, and their own attitudes on family relationships and gender roles. This study uses probit and probit with instrumental variables to examine the effects of these considerations on women's fulltime work status, the dependent variable. Under the assumption of traditional social views regarding men as breadwinners and women as nurturers, increased childcare pressures and spousal potential to provide are expected to decrease the incentive for women to work fulltime. The results of this study are mostly consistent with this theory. One especially interesting finding was that the most influential factor consistently statistically significant in both models used was women's attitudes regarding mother-child relationships.

Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted on women's role in the work force and the special challenges they face. As Lo notes in her study of female professionals in Hong Kong (2003), traditional social roles place much pressure on women who simultaneously pursue both employment and motherhood. Because women are traditionally expected to play a larger role in the home, families often assign greater income-earning responsibility to men (Gorman 1999).

Unlike previous research on women's work decisions which has focused primarily on perceived societal pressures, low-income mothers, or new mothers; this study broadens the scope to married U.S. women with or without children. In doing so, it will consider many of the same explanatory variables examined in the existing literature. As Dex and Joshi (1999) suggest, this study takes into account children and the availability of childcare, income-earning potential of husbands and the stability of the relationship, as well as attitudes toward traditional family roles. Because childcare costs inhibit ability to work for many mothers (particularly low-income mothers), according to Meyers, Heintze, and Wolf (2002), this study also considers the factors of government welfare and childcare subsidies. Like Even (1987) this study also controls for women's education, age, and number of children.



Data

The data for this study came from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) conducted in 2002 by the National Center for Health Statistics. Below is table of the independent variables considered, the expected signs of their marginal effects, and the actual signs:

Variable	Expected Sign	Actual Sign	Variable	Expected Sign	Actual Sign
AGE	-	+**	SPEDUC	-	-.***
EDUCAT	+	-	LIFEPR	+	-
NUMKDHH	-	-.***	WARM	-	-.***
CHCARANY	+	+***	ACHIEVE	+	+***
HLPCHLDC	+	-	MOMWORKD	-	-
PUBASST	-	-.*	EDUCMOM	+	-
SPWRKST	-	-.***			

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ in basic probit

Models

The basic probit model is as follows:

$$Pr(fulltime=1|x) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 age + \beta_2 educat + \beta_3 numkdhh + \beta_4 chcarany + \beta_5 hlpchldc + \beta_6 pubasst + \beta_7 spwrkst + \beta_8 speduc + \beta_9 lifepr + \beta_{10} warm + \beta_{11} achieve)$$

"Fulltime" is defined as working fulltime. "Age" and "education" (in years) control for respondent's personal background. "Numdkhh" (number of children under 18 in respondent's household), "chcarany" (availability of childcare), "hlpchldc" (government assistance with childcare), and "pubasst" (receiving government welfare) all provide information on children and childcare. "Spwrkst" (whether spouse is working), "speduc" (spouse's education level), and "lifepr" (number of sexual partners the respondent has had in her lifetime) provide information on spouse's earning potential and relationship stability. Finally, "warm" (the degree to which respondent disagrees with the statement that "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work") and "achieve" (the degree of disagreement with the statement that "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family") provide information on respondent attitudes on mother-child relationships and gender roles.

To test for endogeneity in the variables "warm" and "achieve" (since these attitudes could also be influenced by whether a woman works or not) I also used a probit regression using respondent's mother's education and work status when respondent was a child as instruments, followed by a Hausman test. Although the Hausman test revealed endogeneity issues, the probit with instrumental variables yielded less accurate results than the basic probit, so the results of both are reported.

Results

•Increased age, use of child care, and disagreement with the idea that it is better for men to earn the main living while women stay home was linked to greater likelihood of working fulltime.

•Increased number of children, having a working spouse, a higher educated spouse, and disagreement with the idea that working mothers can establish just as warm a relationship with their children as non-working mothers was connected to lower likelihood of working fulltime.

•Respondent views on mother-child relationships and gender roles were the only explanatory variables significant at the 0.01 alpha level in both models

•Of the variables that were consistently significant, respondent views on mother-child relationships had the greatest marginal impact on women's work status by far. This implies that, of all the factors considered in this study, a woman's view on whether a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a non-working mother has the greatest potential to influence whether she works fulltime or not.

Analysis

Each model had its strengths and weaknesses. The Hausman test showed that the basic probit model suffered from endogeneity issues, but the probit regression with instrumental variables (the model with stronger theoretical foundations) yielded less accurate forecasts than the probit. Below is a table showing the percent of correctly classified observations for each model:

Model	Probit	IVprobit
Correctly classified	69.53%	53.81%

Conclusion

Overall, the findings in this study were consistent with the theory that children, spouses, and attitudes are important influences in whether or not a woman works fulltime. Perhaps the most interesting result was that, of all 11 independent variables considered, a woman's view on whether or not a working mother could establish just as warm a relationship with her children as a non-working mother had the greatest marginal effect and was statistically significant in both models. It can be understood, then, that a warm and secure relationship with her children is one of the most influential factors in determining whether a woman works fulltime or not.

Women comprise half of America's working age population. In order to better understand the challenges this significant portion of the potential work force faces when making work decisions, more research needs to be done on the effect of fulltime work on mother-child relationships.

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